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ABSTRACT

Research in psycholinguistics and learning theory is reviewed to support the integration of oral and written language skills, and the language experience approach (LEA) is recommended for secondary school second language instruction. This approach incorporates listening, speaking, reading, and writing in purposeful communication. Students use the language they are learning to read directly for meaning and in this process, they bypass the interruptive step of translation. Positive features of the LEA include: writing can be taught in conjunction with reading, students learn from their errors, the approach is learner-centered, and learner-produced materials are motivating. An example is presented to illustrate how a language experience-inspired model can be implemented. Small- and large-group applications are addressed, and a few suggestions are offered to help teachers introduce variety in a familiar context. Current research on linguistic and pedagogical theory suggests the desirability of planning, implementing, and evaluating learner-centered instructional strategies. These include tapping student experiential knowledge, providing learning opportunities for student-to-student interaction, and setting language competence-based goals. Attention is directed to the following considerations: (1) student learning motivation, (2) individual learning pace and style, (3) the use of oral language as a foundation for reading, (4) the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1980), (5) convergent and divergent production, (6) the role of reading when oral and written language skills are interrelated, and (7) language competence versus linguistic performance. (SW)

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A SHORT CUT TO SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR MATURE LEARNERS

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Running Head: Second Language Acquisition

A SHORT CUT TO SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR MATURE LEARNERS

Definition and background

This paper assumes that secondary school language instruction should focus on developing proficiency in meaningful communication based on the integration of oral and written language. In this integration lies the means to bypass the slow, interruptive and laborious step of translating before achieving understanding.

Current research on linguistic and pedagogical theory suggests the desirability to plan, implement, and evaluate learner-centered instructional strategies. These include tapping student experiential knowledge, providing learning opportunities for student to student interaction and setting language competence-based goals. The latter includes the self-monitoring mechanism of learner error analysis with its formative feedback for remediation. This approach contrasts sharply with methods commonly in force.

Pedagogical dichotomy comes from blind adherence to the audio lingual sequence that listening precedes speaking, followed by reading and writing (Hök, 1976; Rivers, 1981). The narrow systematic implementation of the foregoing sequence neglects the supportive influence of reading on developing skill in listening and speaking. Defensive reasons offered for side-stepping reading in second language instruction include: out-dated methodology, inadequate teacher training, and a general absence of textbooks specifically designed for a multiple skills' approach. Justifiable or not, it is understandable that teachers have taken to textbook

determined sequencing of subject matter, most of which was neither field-tested nor is current in terms of learning theory and linguistic research (Hosenfeld, 1979).

Personal observation of classroom techniques in a variety of locales corroborates the foregoing. It follows, then, that student motivation is stifled when language learning is restricted to activities such as: repetition of model sentences, transcription of grammatical drills, and round robin oral reading followed by interlinear translation of same. Repeated use of these and similar exercises leads to teacher-dominated lessons that thwart the communication process and result in learner frustration.

Inefficient methodology calls for a solution

Although research itself cannot provide the answer on how to best promote second language learning, it can provide insight by investigating which solutions can be entertained--given specific problems, situations, and learners. Thus, the more language teachers know about research findings, the more effective they are likely to be in the classroom. This is important because of the time lag that exists between the publication of research findings and their widespread application to instructional programs (Hosenfield, 1979).

In the absence of direct and global integration of research in existing programs, language teachers must intuitively adapt available methods and materials to learner needs and interests.

Needless to say, such an undertaking can be both time-consuming and of inconsistent effectiveness.

Known findings provide direction for change

Once course goals have been identified and learner entering capabilities assessed, the selection/development of appropriate methods and materials can be entertained. A key consideration is student motivation, for it affects attitudes toward the learning activity itself. If pupils perceive a learning experience as potentially interesting, relevant and rewarding, then conditions for self-motivation will be enhanced. Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that a favorable set of attitudes and motivation can compensate for a lack of natural aptitude for second language acquisition, and that these factors can be used to predict successfullearning. These findings underscore the urgency for teachers to address the issue of subject matter purposefulness by coupling relevant content with opportunities for successful learning. Therefore, it is recommended that the common practice of assigning reading beyond students' semantic and syntactic experience be abandoned. Until and unless this is done, students will continue to grope for meaning by resorting to inaccurate clumsy translation; frustration will prevail, and learning will suffer.

Individual learning pace and style

Not all students learn at the same pace, nor do they learn in the same manner. Some process information in small units, one at a time. Others seek an overall understanding of what they see

or hear. No two students learn in exactly the same way, nor should they be expected to do so. Ventriglia (1982) identified three basic language learning styles: beading, braiding, and orchestrating. "Beaders" use an atomistic approach. They learn words incrementally. They need to internalize the meaning of individual words before they can string them together into meaningful units. "Braiders" are just the opposite. Theirs is a global approach based on syntactical relationships. They acquire the new language by weaving chunks together. "Orchestrators" are still different. These learners process language on a phonological basis. They use intonation as a guide to general meaning by starting out with sounds, then words, moving on to phrases, and ultimately, complete sentences.

Learner individuality calls for flexibility of methodology

Since learners employ different strategies to arrive at meaning, teacher preference for a specific method of instruction is neither pertinent nor practical. Conversely, method selection based on an eclectic strategy allows for flexibility, thereby accommodating a range of learner styles as well as individual needs and interests.

Rationale for using oral language as a foundation for reading

Both written and oral language share common dependence on syntactic and semantic constraints. Whichever the skill, be it listening, speaking, reading, or writing, the learner engages in the universal processes of sampling, predicting, testing, and

confirming of meaning (Goodman, 1967; 1973). Application of these probing processes to reading is a means of reducing uncertainty. This signifies that learner dependence on visual features varies with the amount of syntactic information available in a given text (Smith, 1971). The greater the learners' familiarity with vocabulary and structure, the less dependent they are on visual information. Seen from this perspective, reading becomes only incidentally visual. It follows that reading material for second language learners which simultaneously focuses on new grammar and vocabulary should be avoided. Reading material, especially at the early stages of study, should conform to the learner's oral command of the target language. Logically, reading becomes an adaptation or extension of the learner's developing competence in spoken language. Hence, oral language is the vehicle for transfer in developing skill in reading and/or writing.

Learning that occurs under these conditions can equip students with broad patterns of skill application rather than isolated relationships (Burrows, 1964). So defined, oral and written language skills are intertwined. Such a consolidated approach facilitates the shaping of a comprehensive pattern of skill acquisition central to accelerated progress in second language learning.

Model of second language input

Krashen (1980) has proposed an Input Hypothesis which states that learners acquire a second language by understanding linguistic input slightly beyond their current level of proficiency.

Presentation of new material should be couched in a familiar context so that an understanding of the unknown can be sensed using the radar of learner experience as well as verbal and nonverbal clues. In teaching this way, facts are presented verbally or visually, and can be assimilated by the learner in broad categories. Accordingly, in the early stages of second language instruction, extensive exposure to oral language should be provided using a variety of sources: teacher modeling, tapes, records, films, etc. The learner's initial use of the target language is then based on rehearsal, assimilation and/or adaptation of authentic communication. This is referred to as convergent production (Assistant Masters, 1979). Consequently, students acquire new vocabulary and grammar in a meaningful context.

In using this model, teachers are the bridge between the source of information and the learners. Teachers facilitate learning by drawing upon technology for various sources of authentic language input. Factors such as, pacing of instruction and variety of input are teacher-monitored in response to learner ability and skill development. Having received increased exposure to new material over time, learners move from convergent to divergent production. At this stage, to encourage creativity and individuality, teachers focus on learner manipulation of language.

Transition from convergent to divergent production is complex. It requires moving from the manageably familiar and much repeated, to independent expression in the target language. This is a difficult task for learners, particularly high school age and older,

because of their natural fear of producing ludicrous unidiomatic gaffes characteristic of initial attempts to communicate in a foreign language (Assistant Masters, 1979). Such anxiety can be lessened, motivation sustained, and learning promoted through instructional approaches that capitalize on the interrelationship of oral and written language skills. Empirical evidence indicates that students learn what they need and want to learn faster than when they have no motivation to learn. Further, they learn more in context than what they learn in isolation (Vann, 1979).

The role of reading when oral and written language skills are interrelated

Joseph Michel (1967) affirms that an appropriate second language reading program is one in which the student learns to read as much as possible through direct association, linking the written foreign language to its meaning. Reading, based on the familiar, serves to reinforce what is being learned by ear. Linguistic competence is enhanced by a gradual introduction of new words. These are carefully spaced and then repeated in such a variety of contexts that recognition and facility of usage becomes automatic. The syntax used in the reading materials is kept at a level which parallels students' speaking/listening development, and supplemented as dictated by learner communication needs. Consequently, emphasis is placed on the anticipation of meaning triggered by contextual clues, general linguistic knowledge, and audio-visual stimuli. In this approach, literary texts need not be excluded. Those chosen, however, should be compatible with students' command of syntactic and

semantic features. Classroom observations suggest that current practice runs counter to this logic. Teachers cannot afford to overlook the fact that reading has its roots in oral language proficiency (Hosenfeld, 1979). Marcum's research (1943) strongly suggests that children's early reading should not be complicated by the need for simultaneous concept development. Her suggestions apply equally to second language learners. Educators must consider second language vocabulary size as well as concept load so that comprehension is not obfuscated (Modiano, 1968). Imagine reading Molière's 17th century comedies after only two years of high school French! The quantum leap from dialogues to classical literature requiring a conceptual appreciation far beyond student language competence and needs is an indictment of professional myopia.

Language competence versus linguistic performance

To capitalize on the inherent learning potential in the supportive effect of reading on listening and speaking, teacher effort should be made to promote communication competence. This means that teacher orchestration of learning activities should center on replicating genuine communication based on interaction between learner and materials (Duda, 1979). Care should be exercised to develop multi-skill activities that distinguish between language competence and linguistic performance. In the former, the process of acquiring language is emphasized. Analysis of learner errors provides input for instructional content, revision,

and pacing. On the other hand, when linguistic performance is stressed, syntactic perfection, albeit mechanical, is the desired outcome. Current trends in second language research favor instructional emphasis on the development of language competence. Sources of student errors are many, and procedures for error analysis are still much debated. However, there is evidence that on-the-spot discrimination, analysis and categorization of errors contribute more effectively to learner manipulation of a problem than does the memorization of corresponding grammar rules followed by drill work removed from original context.

Guidelines for teaching reading in a second language

The development of oral competence (in the non-hearing-impaired) is a prerequisite for fluent silent reading. Research shows that traditional emphasis on meticulous word by word reading aloud impedes, rather than enhances, comprehension. Understanding so acquired is restricted to narrow eye span movements where the point of focus is on isolated bits of information provided by unrelated words (Hök, 1979). Reading specialists concur that word by word vocalization hinders fast silent reading. To be understood, they say, words must develop structured meaning in groups--the larger the groups, the more comprehensive the meaning of what is being read (Goodman, 1973; 1977).

In order to promote reading comprehension, materials should be selected for their compatibility with the learner's developing skills. Ideally, reading selections should reflect the learner's

background and knowledge. In this manner, the goal of understanding the new and different is approached via the well-known and commonplace.

The task of material selection/preparation and presentation is not an easy one for there are no convenient ready-made procedures that can be applied. The guiding principle is tailoring instruction to the learner. This means that given the state of present knowledge and available materials, effective teaching of reading in a second language is to be the work of informed and competent teachers. This includes the ability to make decisions based on intuition and experience together with the flexibility to adjust techniques to purpose. Method selection should be based on a sampling of proven techniques suitable to the situation in question. The Language Experience Approach is an instructional strategy compatible with the aforementioned eclectic perspective.

LEA and reading in a second language

The Language Experience Approach is a mode of instruction which incorporates listening, speaking, reading and writing in purposeful communication (Hall, 1978). In this process, students learn the communicative power of language by using language. Instructional emphasis is on learning by doing. Students participate in activities which promote the interaction of language with personal experience. They verbalize this interaction and in time, learn that what they can say, they can write and what they can

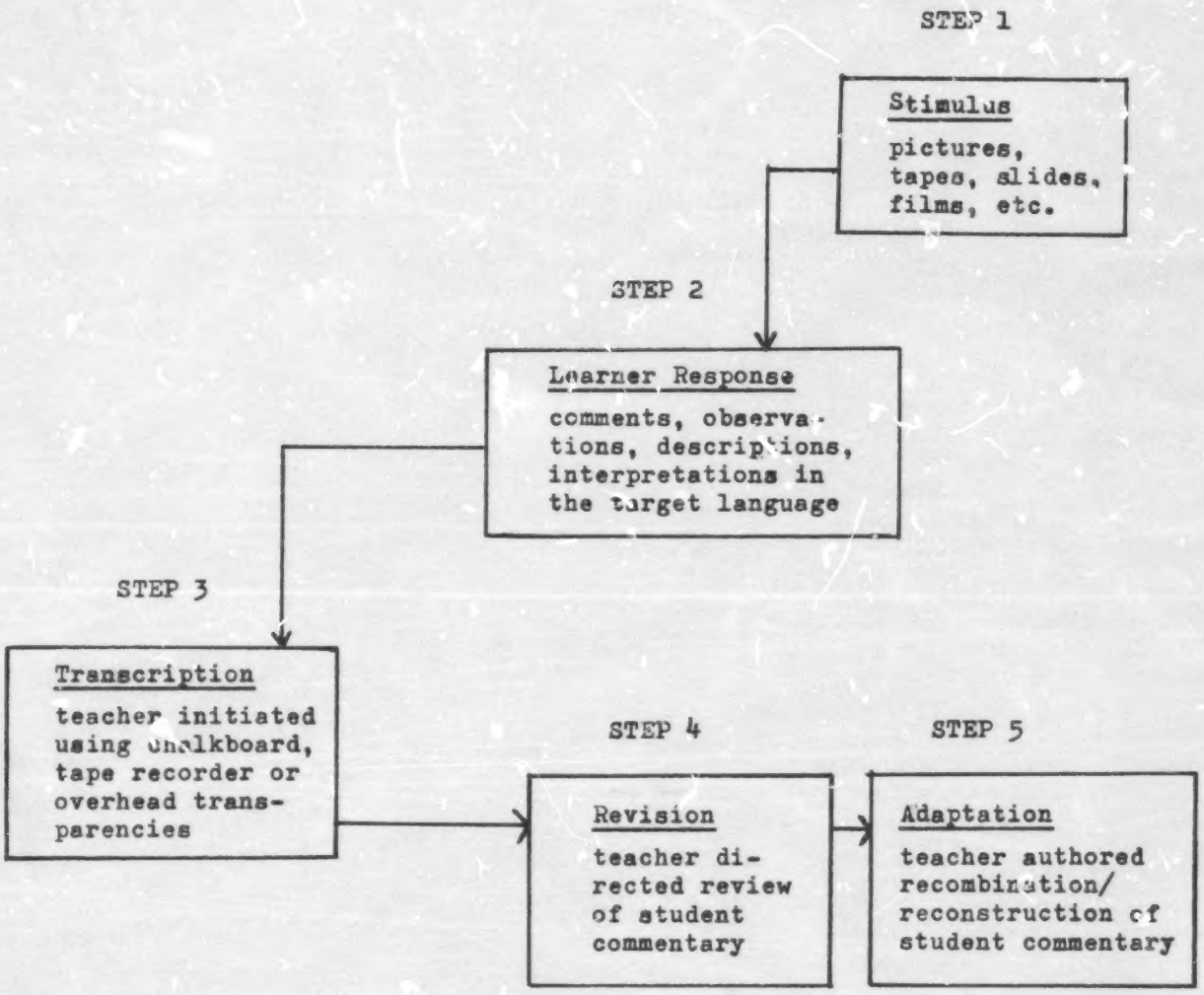
write, they can read (Stauffer, 1976).

Given this rationale, it follows that with an adequate aural/oral background, second semester level I students can begin creating their own reading material. An attractive feature of this approach is that it can be used to teach writing in conjunction with reading. Furthermore, since students learn from their errors, their attitude toward themselves and toward the foreign language is more favorable than it might otherwise have been were they penalized for making errors.

Another positive feature of LEA is that it is learner-centered. Student to student interaction is not only desirable, but integral to successful application of the approach. This alone is a marked improvement over commonly practiced techniques favoring teacher-dominated instruction.

Yet another strength of LEA is the fact that learner-produced materials are motivating. Because students are familiar with the language used in their writings, they can read successfully. Positive feedback is not only rewarding, but also fosters learner independence. As progress in language competence is made, students can engage in appropriate extensive reading activities.

An LEA Model for reading in a second language



Suggestions for application

The following example has been developed to illustrate how a language experience-inspired model can be implemented. Suggested activities may be varied to accommodate a range of stimuli as well as varying levels of student ability.

1. Stimulus

Overhead transparency composed of a series of simple line drawings representing a story.

Note: Discarded textbooks and workbooks often contain attractive black and white illustrations that can easily be made into transparencies.

2. Student reaction

A. Large group approach

Students volunteer comments, sentences, etc. describing what they see, frame by frame. Running commentary is dictated to the teacher who transcribes it verbatim at the chalkboard. Under teacher guidance, the completed dictation is revised. Sentences are rearranged, appropriate vocabulary introduced, and grammatical revisions made. Students copy the 'model' or story into their notebooks.

B. Small group approach

Students working in groups of three or four members each tape record a collaborative description of the picture series. Transcription is made later by the teacher. Major flaws resulting from the incorporation of English words or phrases

should be edited prior to duplication of student-generated commentaries. Next, a set of copies consisting of each group's work is distributed to the entire class. The teacher reads each description aloud as the students follow silently, noting the text's positive features by placing a plus sign (+) next to interesting words, expressions, ideas, etc. Accordingly, areas for improvement are identified by a minus sign (-). Results are shared for large group discussion and informal evaluation.

3. Suggestions for teacher adaptation of student descriptions

These suggestions are made to help teachers introduce variety in a familiar context.

Dictation

Teachers can use student-authored materials as a framework for highlighting key semantic and syntactic elements. By recombining familiar material into a different, but complementary context, such as a narrative or a dialogue, teachers can systematically reinforce specific learning outcomes.

Compte rendu

This summary exercise is commonly used in European language arts classes. It is designed to develop multiple skills by capitalizing on the parallels between oral and written language.

Using the familiar context of student-developed descriptions as an advance organizer, the teacher prepares a new, more

elaborate story using a combination of forms: narration, description, and dialogue.

Only the teacher has a copy of the text which s/he proceeds to read aloud. During the first reading, students listen for global meaning. They are not expected to comprehend all they hear, but they are expected to capture the gist of the story, dialogue, etc. During the second reading, students may jot down notes for future reference. Following this step, students are directed to summarize the passage in their own words. Although this can be done orally as a group exercise, it is recommended that it be done in writing on an individual basis. This provides feedback to the teacher on student integration of oral and written language skills.

This exercise can be introduced as early as the second semester of the first year of language study, provided students have acquired a working knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure. The greater the degree of learner competence in the second language, the more sophisticated this exercise can be. Critical to the success of any language experience activity is that it be tailored to the learner's incremental knowledge and understanding of language.

Concluding remarks

The purposeful integration of oral and written language skills is based on insights obtained from research in psycholinguistics and learning theory. The eclectic nature of the Language Experience Approach lends itself to a multiplicity of

instructional applications. Given the rationale that a student's knowledge of language and life experiences can be used to create appropriate reading materials, LEA seems to be a viable and logical approach for use with students learning a second language. Students use the language they are learning to read directly for meaning and in this process, they bypass the interruptive step of translation. However, as simple and as logical as this appears, it does demand a degree of teacher skill, planning and sensitivity. Nonetheless, the potential rewards are well worth the investment.

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